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DIALOGUE IN VIEW OF HUMAN CARING

Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the elements for an *anthropology of dialogue* that can be offered through an anthropological deepening of rhetoric. From the attention that is due to the interlocutor as a person, we obtain—in the light of both the philosophy of care and the theory of politeness—a particular approach to the notion of *service*. This notion, made ambiguous by our modern sensitivity, receives a new reading when it is interpreted in the sense of ‘care’. In recalling the ancient roots of the notion of person, it is revealing how much the recent relational sociology offers to conceive dialogue as a relational good, a *human good* that only can be *made together*. The conditions for reaching this specific approach are recent, even if the fundamental notions (relation, person, service, care) are rather old.

Key words: rhetoric, dialogue, care, politeness, person

“Y Cortés le replicó muy buenas razones, y el Montezuma le respondía muy mejores.” (Díaz del Castillo 2005: 35-36)

“Cortes answered him with excellent arguments, which Montezuma countered with even better.” (Díaz del Castillo 2007: 246) – November 14th, 1519.

The notion of person has a long history, evolving through the centuries. Often we forget that *person*, as we are accustomed to conceiving it, namely implying a sensitivity to human dignity and a sense of duty to respect everyone, neither existed in every age nor in every culture. Obviously, this is not the moment to reconstruct this history, not even in synthesis. One should bear in mind its relevance, however, in order to understand a further step in its development: the current place of care in the conception of what is *human*. Putting these notions

together is an appropriate task for an anthropological rhetoric, which is the profile of this paper (cf. Agnetta *et al.* 2018).

The ambiguity of service

The term “care” is subject to divergent interpretations as it intersects with the ambiguous conceptual field of “service”. In Western society, serving is generally frowned upon, as it seems to be incompatible with human dignity. At the same time, society is full of demands for and offers of service. This is the tertiary sector of the economy, better known as the “white-collars”. In an evaluation of the action of serving, thus, it depends very much on the rhetoric one uses to talk about it.

The verb “to serve” comes from Latin, and hence, shares the same root with the Latin languages (Fr. *servir*, It. *servire*...). Properly, it means ‘being slave’ (Lat. *servus*) and, in this sense, it functions as an intransitive verb. It can also be used as a transitive verb when accompanied by an object which, in this case, is the served person.

Servitium was the ‘condition of slave’, and the corresponding *service* (Fr. *service*, It. *servizio*...) meant the actions of one who serves as slave. The wide spectrum of meanings of *servicing* eventually led to its usage in less harsh terms, ranging from meaning a ‘servant’, without any connotations of slavery (monarchies, feudal system), to the current meaning of tertiary sector of economy. Metonymically, *service* means also objects, sets of objects, events, etc.: table service, room service, divine service... Such meanings are metonymical in the origin, but already lexicalized.

The negative perception of this notion is the lack of autonomy, proper to slavery. *Autonomy* is an intrinsically relative notion (what is autonomous is autonomous from something), and therefore, one could also negatively perceive any service carried out by a servant (who is subject to a sovereign), or even a service offered by an employee. Sometimes the use of *service* highlights the quality of being free (*gratis*); sometimes it implies a regular paid job.

Some examples

To illustrate the common negative perception of service here, it helps to look at two revealing anecdotes. During a conference in Göteborg, 2001, I attended a social dinner without waiters. The food was wonderful at the Feskekorka (Fish Market), it was a real dinner party, but without waiters. When I asked my colleagues around why (as it was a little strange for me), they responded with another question: “Why should you eat while they are working”?

Another instance occurred some years before, when an Argentinean philosopher was in Mexico for a conference. At one point, he saw in a square some shoeshiners and expressed to his accompanying colleague his total rejection of going to them: “Imagine, someone at your feet working for you...” Hearing later about this story, I observed the work of shoeshiners. I realized that the clients are low-middle class people like the shiners themselves and, as the shiners want to work, I suggested: “Give some work to them, have a good conversation with them to show your respect, and pay two or three times what they ask...” It would be ironic to have such a great respect for them, and yet not support them in their much needed work. For the soundness of this argumentation, recognizing the intrinsic dignity of the concrete job is essential: it is obvious that the same thing cannot be said for drug trafficking or for prostitution.

Personhood

Autonomy is very relevant to the notion of person. In a philosophical analysis, the matter concerns the relationship between means and ends. The person as an *end* in himself/herself, and not as a *means*, is constitutive of Western culture. Kant is often quoted when one tries to formulate this notion, usually citing his well-known maxim: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in any other person, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (2002: 230).¹

“Always as an end” is very clear, unlike the following words “Never as a means only”, because “merely” is often forgotten. Sometimes Kant is quoted without this adverb, but more meaningful than this oversight is the fact that the predisposition of Western culture, or the instinct one could say, functions without this “merely”. To be a means, however, is not per se in contradiction with being a person. What is in contradiction with this is to be *merely a means*, i.e., not to be an end in oneself.

Here lies the difference between things and persons. The former are means (and only means), while the latter are ends (but could be also means). This is the basis for the well-known concept presented in the common sayings, such as “Persons are to be loved, things are to be used”; or, “Love the persons, use the things”. Negatively put, “Don’t use the persons, love them; don’t love the things, use them”. This is one step toward understanding the notion of care and the meaning of dialogue for human person.

Nevertheless, this notion of person and the consciousness of a person’s dignity are older than Kant. Saint Augustine explains the same concept in an

¹ “Handle so, dass du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchest” (Kant 1911: 429).

eminently rhetoric work. In a classification of all that there is, he says that everything falls under one of these three cases:

There are some things which are to be enjoyed (*quibus fruendum est*), some which are to be used (*quibus utendum*), and some whose function is both to enjoy and use (*quae fruuntur et utuntur*). [...] To enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire (1995: I.4.4).

As regards the content of Augustine's classification, subjects to be enjoyed are only three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is: persons, eternal persons, not-created persons. Subjects to be used are: things or objects. "Those things which are objects of use [*istis quibus utendum est*] assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them" (Augustinus 1995: I.3.3). Subjects that enjoy and use are the angels and human beings, that is: created persons. (Both are also enjoyed and used. While this is clearly Augustine's thought, he does not explicitly say this in the quoted work.)

The reluctance before the notion of service could find its answer here, as these notions (end, means, person, thing) are the resources to understand the relation of service to human dignity. The entire spectrum of autonomies and lacks of autonomy are to be framed within these parameters. The notion of person itself brings with it a sense of service. It is significant that, in the exposition that follows, "service" could often be substituted with "care", because the philosophy of care is now a light making visible a new understanding of personhood. (To be clear: service and care are not equivalent. For example, *divine service* is not care, at least in monotheistic cults.) The main reluctance comes from the abbreviated version of Kant's words: we are proud to be considered "always as an end and never as a means [only]". Tracing the origin to such a sensitivity as described in Kant, the door was initially opened by the Cartesian division, namely, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The human person, of course, feels himself to be *res cogitans*. Everything discovered within, on the other hand, that is obviously *res extensa*, is embarrassing, it is an object of shame.

Embodied minds

Not only the purely physical properties of human bodies make men feel as *res extensa*, but also their animality. One does not have to think like Descartes that animals are machines (cf. 1902: 56; cf. Cottingham 1978) to feel embarrassed: the problem is the animality, even an animated animality. Freud offers a proof for such modern sensitivity, considering as an *outrage* (*Kränkung*) the idea of man belonging to the same kind as the animals. In Freud's own words: "when biological research robbed man of his apparent superiority under special

creation, and rebuked him with his descent from the animal kingdom, and his ineradicable animal nature” (Freud [1916-17] 1920: 247).

One aspect of the philosophy of care regards the awareness of the human’s embodied condition, which is lost in modern times. The title of a book by Alasdair MacIntyre is very revealing in this sense: *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999). Dependence does not only refer to extreme or pathological situations but also, first and foremost, to all of ordinary life, since the need to eat, drink, rest and many other needs are met by the human community. This is also the proper place for dialogue. “We are minds, and therefore we dialogue”, is a spontaneous way to think, and while not quite wrong, the human person is not pure mind, but *embodied mind*. This distinction is decisive for the nature of dialogue.

The terms *dependence*, *vulnerability* and *need*, each express with slight variations the same aspect of the human condition. *Need* is a relative notion. Basic needs are not the only real needs. MacIntyre writes:

What someone in dire need is likely to need immediately here and now is food, drink, clothing and shelter. But, when these first needs have been met, what those in need then most need is to be admitted or readmitted to some recognized position within some network of communal relationships in which they are acknowledged as a participating member of a deliberative community, a position that affords them both empowering respect from others and self-respect (MacIntyre 1999: 127).

The freedom from first needs is real freedom, human freedom. The need to eat continues, however. Beyond that, man also needs human relationships, and human community in which the members communicate in various ways, among which is dialogue. A “deliberative community” obviously needs this dialogue.

Relationality

The notion of person is founded on relation, and the theological roots of this foundation are very old (see Saint Augustine). This notion has been fruitful in anthropology and ethics through the centuries, but not so much in sociology.

The relational turn in scientific thought (episteme, method, praxis) is relatively recent. Although we can find several relational elements in the thought of many classical philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Aquinas) and modern ones (Hume, Locke, Hegel and others), the relationality we now speak of in a reflexive sense becomes conscious and thematized only in the 20th century (Donati 1991: 14).

According to Donati (1991: 151), the rise in focus on relationality occurred recently in our society, and it is the tertiary sector. It consists of the production of *relational goods*, that is, not produced by the state or the market. “Common good”, in the context of relationality, is not understood as a good that belongs to several

persons, maybe even to all persons, but rather “a good that can be produced only together, no one can be excluded to be a part of it, it cannot be divided and it is not conceivable as the sum of individual goods” (Donati 1991: 156).

The main point in this text is “produced together”. While gas, electricity, water etc., are the sum of individual goods, and in this sense are “common”, they are not produced *together*. In this case, men would produce *together* two homogeneous parts of a quantitative totality, but what is produced is the same. In a relational good men produce *integral parts*, like the parts of a house. For instance, without a roof the construction would not be a house, just as it would not be a house without any of its other parts. Friendship, love, family, society are relational goods. Further, Donati concludes that human life is a relational good, as well as its quality.² One can easily deduce, thus, that all cases of care fall under the field of relational goods. “Taking care” is always *of someone* (or *of something*, but not in proper sense), that is, there has to be someone who gives the care and someone who receives it. Eva Feder Kittay highlights the essential role of the cared for in order for care to be complete (the creation of the relational good), namely, by graciously accepting it (cf. Kittay 2014: 39).

Dialogue

Dialogue is a prime case of relational good. Dialogue is only produced by a certain togetherness of human persons. Cognitive exchange between humans cannot be conceived as a supplement of knowledge because what is known through others is much more than what one knows by direct experience. The form of this exchange is dialogical because of naturally differing perspectives i.e. the plurality of views and interpretations, consequence of the human condition. Human language offers a highly complex syntax to express such a plurality of views and interpretations as well as a subject’s relation to the content, captured by the notion of subjectification. For example, consider the amount of information contained in a sentence like “They must be afraid of us”: while something about the subject is said, it is only through the mediation of speaker’s knowledge and inference. There could be a volitional element in the mediation too, and also the presence of modalities (necessity, possibility, etc.). Related to

² “Perché posso dire che la vita umana del bambino che deve nascere è un bene comune per l’Alter (generalizzato e non generalizzato) e non solo un diritto di quel particolare bambino? Perché posso dire che è un bene comune della madre, e del padre e di quelli che gli stanno intorno? La risposta è: perché tutte queste persone hanno qualcosa in comune che è appunto la relazione che le lega, e questa relazione ha i suoi diritti che non possono essere manipolati, colonizzati o calpestati in qualunque modo, perché se si calpestano questi diritti, quelli delle relazioni sociali, viene distorto completamente il senso dell’individuo come persona umana e quindi, necessariamente, si va contro la vita umana e tutto ciò che è bene comune nella società” (Donati 1991: 157).

this is the Theory of Mind (ToM), namely, the ability to attribute mental states to others, which is the first step in understanding that the beliefs, desires or perspectives of others are different from one's own (cf. Abraham 2012: 24ff).

A further element that helps to illuminate the place of dialogue in human life comes from Margaret Archer's theory about the origin of social agency. She claims that *to be human* depends on one's interaction with the real world, first of all with other persons. Yet, this relationship is only possible because it is preceded by an internal conversation. There is a consciousness, a reflexivity, which also explains why the worst loneliness is that which occurs even when one is among other persons (Archer 2003: 105ff).

In Nahuatl—Mexican language—an expression that signifies 'being in this world' is "tlalticpac tenahuac", literally "on the earth next to people" or "beside someone". A poem by Nezahualcoyotl (1402-1472) captures the cruel experience of loneliness when he had to flee to save his life. A typical translation of his verses might run: "I remained abandoned on the earth", in which "on the earth" translates the aforementioned expression. Thus, the entire phrase would be: "I remained abandoned on the earth next to the people" (cf. Garibay 2000: 57). In this manner, "abandoned next to the people", or, "alone beside someone", is in fact the dramatic reality of loneliness. This oxymoron is an absolute reality in human condition.

Another example of this oxymoron is found in the film *Babel* (González Iñárritu 2006). One of its characters, a Japanese girl named Chieko, is searching for friends and just in the middle of a crowded party in a nightclub she discovers her total loneliness.

Besides man's rational and linguistic characteristics, according to the most traditional definition (*logos* means not only 'reason' but also 'word'), relationality must also be included to complete the framework for an anthropology of dialogue. A relationality, moreover, closely linked to language. According to Archer's view, "internal conversation" with oneself makes possible conversation with others. She goes further even, saying the characteristics of one's conversation with others depends on the profile of one's internal one, identifying four main types.³

"Rational animal" is a common definition often considered complementary to "political animal". The definition, on the other hand, in three concepts "dependent rational animal" is arguably more expressive than "political rational animal" because it denotes the reason for the political link between human beings. In a hypothesis considering pure minds (angels, spirits, etc.), it would be difficult to imagine them without any contact. They should have a much clearer and more complete communication than human beings! It would not be based upon a need, however, a need for each other which, in the case of the human person, stems from

³ The communicative reflexive members of the society, the autonomous reflexives, the meta-reflexives and the fractured reflexives (cf. 2003: 153-341).

nature being both body and mind. In short, dependence as an essential constitutive of humanity turns care into a general vocation for all human beings.

Care and politeness

Among the many issues in an anthropology of dialogue, a pragmatic one seems to be central. If care is required for human fulfillment (the human being understood as “*dependent* rational animal”), what is the linguistic notion most related to care? It seems accurate to suggest it would be politeness, whose object is management of the image: that of the others and one’s own (cf. Jiménez Cataño 2014a). It is true that in common use the terms “politeness” and “care” are found at the extremes of minimal and maximum of personal involvement, being *polite* as ‘just polite’ and being *careful* as ‘having a real committed kindness.’ Yet the most classic explanation of politeness (cf. Brown-Levinson 1987: 61) speaks of “maintaining face in interaction” and points out *heedfulness* as the decisive notion for understanding politeness. On the other hand, care has a wide range of involvement and in the most significant definitions the verb “maintain” is recurrent: “activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher-Tronto 1991: 40), which coincides with the notion of care offered in advance by Heidegger ([1951] 2000: 151), in the sense of maintaining things in their essence.

Saving someone’s face when dealing with threats is itself an act of care. Human beings take care of each other, in different ways and on various levels, also in relationships which do not necessarily entail actions such as cooking for others, giving others a lift, etc. Human beings taking care of each other mostly means taking care of one’s image, of one’s face. When someone takes care of another one’s face, they take care of the other, because face and person form a unity:

A human being has not only a body but also a face. A face cannot be grafted or interchanged. A face is a message, a face speaks, often unbeknown to the person. Is not the human face a living mixture of mystery and meaning? We are all able to see it, and are all unable to describe it. Is it not a strange marvel that among so many hundreds of millions of faces, no two faces are alike? And that no face remains quite the same for more than one instant? The most exposed part of the body, the best known, it is the least describable, a synonym for an incarnation of uniqueness. Can we look at a face as if it were a commonplace? (Heschel 1965: 38).

This text clearly shows how the symbolic dimension of the face is twofold: it stands for the whole body (and so for the whole person as well) and at the same time it stands for the image of the person. Best known for his ethics that starts from a phenomenology of the face is Emmanuel Lévinas, according to whom the primordial meaning of the face is “Do not kill me” ([1984] 1990: 8-9). Let us not go into the question of why the meaning is not “Love me,” which would imply

an untimely digression, but we realize that both in the positive and negative formulation, the face carries a call to attention, it is a founding fact of our awareness of otherness (cf. Jiménez Cataño 2014b: 323-328).⁴

The well-known notion of face in a pragmatic context, namely, “the public self-image that every member [*of the society*] wants to claim for himself” (Brown-Levinson 1987: 61) opens one’s vision to the two sides of dialogue: the internal conversation and the public one. Politeness and its strategies to protect “the face” focus mainly on the face of the others. The theory of Rong Chen (2001) regarding “self politeness” was seen as something new. If the face that politeness defends is foremost that of others, and the awareness of what face is (desire for agreement or desire for autonomy; cf. Brown-Levinson 1987: 13) refers to one’s own face, where does the transition take place from one’s own face to that of others? In addition, why do humans defend another’s face? Just for convenience’s sake, thinking, “if I protect another’s faces, they will protect mine”?

Our notion of ‘face’ is derived from that of Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term, which ties face up with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or ‘losing face’. Thus face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people cooperate (and assume each other’s cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone’s face depends on everyone else’s being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten other’s face, it is in general in every participant’s best interest to maintain each other’s face, that is to act in ways that assure the other participants that the agent is heedful of the assumptions concerning face given under (i) above. (Just what this heedfulness consists in is the subject of this paper.) (Brown-Levinson 1987: 61)⁵

Here one finds the aforementioned sensitivity to feel that the person and their image form a unity. Furthermore, “vulnerability” is one of the terms used as an alternative to “dependence” and “need”. Human beings are vulnerable in the vulnerability of their faces. This specific vulnerability is a *common* property and, as regards relationship, vulnerability is *mutual*, as well as the protection or care offered to each other if heedfulness is present. Brown and Levinson present the mutual character of vulnerability and of the offered care in a quite descriptive way. What is this heedfulness? Why are human beings heedful, or at least possibly so? This is a matter of fundamental rhetoric (cf. Oesterreich 1990): heedfulness is goodwill, and the best way to obtain the goodwill of one’s interlocutor is to show one’s own (cf. Jiménez Cataño 2014a).

⁴ Another consideration that we cannot afford here is the complementary value that Lévinas’ anthropology represents in relation to the philosophy of care, which sees first and foremost the mother and the teacher as models of caregiver. In his development of the notion of otherness, for the articulation of the “I” and the “you”, Lévinas thinks primarily of fatherhood ([1961] 1984: 244-247; [1980] 1989: 85-89).

⁵ The “i” section is the definition of face and its two forms, negative and positive (Goffman 1967).

The fact that communication is obtained through speaker's and hearer's goodwill fulfills the essence of *relational good*. This is the *common good* in the sense that "your good is my good". Therein lies the human vocation to care. People can have many possible vices, and everyone, even without being villain, can be more or less careless, selfish, or overbearing, and maybe, even when individuals are not always ready to help, they understand and recognize that the lives of others are calling them (cf. Jiménez Cataño 2018). One reacts to them according to many circumstances, such as one's own politeness profile, one's own dominant face, and so on.

Two basic common goods are present in human dialogue, the second in narrower sense of relational good: a) the content (knowledge, truth, information, etc.) and b) the relationship between persons. Both were already present from the very beginning of the politeness theory. These two goods, in fact, are the departing point for Lakoff's maxims ("be clear!", "be polite!"), explaining that, "in most informal conversations, the actual communication of important ideas is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationships" (1973: 297-298).

Concluding remarks

For an anthropology of dialogue that takes into account recent developments in the philosophy of care and linguistic pragmatics, a decisive element is the notion of the person and what derives from it from a social point of view, i.e. interpersonal relations. The relation cannot be of pure utility. This is the place of relational goods, hence that of acts of care and dialogue. (We have set aside the acts of care whose object is not a person, and the possibility that the care is not carried out by a person.) An act of care exists in the relationship between two persons, to such an extent that it is claimed that the act is not complete if the cared person do not receive it (cf. Kittay 2014). It is quite obvious that dialogue exists in the relation between two persons as well: also dialogue is *produced together*. A dialogue that is cut off because of an interruption will be cut off, but it is a dialogue; if there is no interlocutor, there is no dialogue.

Human beings need, for their flourishing, interaction with other humans (cf. MacIntyre 1999: 67-68), which happens mainly through dialogue. Our knowledge of human life owes much to our dialogues on human life. When we want to indicate the necessary characteristics of this dialogue, we necessarily have recourse to qualities that belong to care. On the other hand, the identification of the self and the other (their presentation, their image) is so relevant that necessarily a dominant aspect of this care concerns the *face*. Much of the image of ourselves that we have comes from what others say about us, from our face mirrored by others and elaborated through the internal conversation.

Such a type of care, concerning the image, can be considered to some extent already developed thanks to the theory of politeness. This is priceless material

that has been developed over the last almost 50 years. However, anthropological analysis can enrich this material, which is most often descriptive.

Hence politeness, as care of the image, is less superficial than it might seem (and as some common formulas present it, such as the contraposition between being and appearing, the “culture of appearance”, and so on): *care of the image* can itself be *care of the person*. “I am my image” has the same value as “I am my body”. But it is also a universal experience that we see at the same time that image as something we *have*, and we can manage it as something different from us. It remains for other reflections (which are already underway) a specific study on the distance between *the public self-image everyone wants to claim for himself* (cf. Brown-Levinson 1987: 61) and the reality of things, yet the care of one’s own image, although susceptible to corruption, is care of oneself, and the care of the image of others is care of the person, the most ordinary and universal that we can usually offer. Care will be all the more effective the clearer the acknowledgement (even implicit) of the personhood—and therefore the respect due—and in this awareness the realization that the aspects of dependence are not the “non-human” of the person but deeply human realities can be decisive.

A high percentage of the actions of care that we can offer each other take place in dialogue, particularly those that have to do with care of the image. In this area is difficult for us to recognize the traits of service, rather beyond the content of the conversation, a dynamism takes place that in its minimal expression is *recognition of the other as a person*. Just as there is a wide range of involvement that responds to the concept of care, so *need* is not only ‘dire need’. There is also the real and human need of being recognized in communal relationships (cf. MacIntyre 1999: 127), in a deliberative community, as we read in the epigraph that opens these pages, taken from a dialogue that just turned 500 years old which shows in a nutshell the recognition, and mutual legitimacy, of the common rationality and dignity. Actual sharing of ideas is really secondary to the relationship to be reaffirmed and strengthened.

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